

Advantage Watertown Committee
August 14, 2014
Meeting Minutes

The Committee met at 8:30 a.m. on the third floor of City Hall in the City Council Chambers. Present were the following Committee Members:

John Bartow, Chairman
Jeffrey Graham, Vice Chairman
Scott St. Joseph
Michelle Capone
Peter Schmitt
Jason White
Lynn Pietroski

Also present were the following:

Michael Lumbis
Brian Phelps

MINUTES

Mr. Bartow noted that there were not enough members present for a quorum; therefore the Minutes from the June 12, 2014 meeting would have to wait for approval until the next meeting.

RENTAL REGISTRATION

Mayor Graham reported that the Rental Registration Committee participated in a conference call with officials from the City of Buffalo to learn about their rental registration program. He said that Council Member Jennings has said that he will be drafting proposed legislation some time this fall. Mayor Graham noted that there has been some opposition from property owners regarding a potential rental registration program and that support was mainly from City Hall. Ms. Capone noted that the City of Buffalo's program requires the registration of one-and two-family units as New York State Code already requires that houses with three or more units obtain a Certificate of Occupancy every three years. She said that while there was some dissent on the committee regarding rental registration there was also a lot of support.

Dr. White wondered whether the opposition was just about the idea of rental inspections, the rental registration, or both. Mr. Graham said that there is a concern about so-called "grandfathered" units being subject to enforcement action at some point in the future. Ms. Capone noted that the City of Buffalo felt that rental registration was a helpful tool to both the Police Department and Code Enforcement Office. Mr. Schmitt said that the individuals who were objecting should be brought to the table so that they could come up with ideas on how to make a program work.

Mr. Phelps noted that one of the problems is that there is no single database that the City has that describes exactly what is out there. He said that Codes often relies on Assessment data but that their data is not always 100% accurate.

Mr. St. Joseph noted that a rental registration program would help the City keep focus on blighted properties and the City's efforts to improving them as well as the neighborhoods in which they are located.

CDBG CONSOLIDATED PLAN

Mr. Lumbis reported that Planning Staff had submitted the City's Community Development Block Grant Program Consolidated Plan to HUD last week. He noted that HUD has 45 days to approve the plan, after which the City can begin completing environmental reviews and begin project implementation. Mr. Lumbis said that the City's annual action plan for this year includes support of the Maple Court Apartments project, a rental rehab program, a sidewalk program, blight removal and other projects.

DOWNTOWN PROJECTS

Mayor Graham noted that there is a new plan in the works for the former Tico's Restaurant located on the north side of Public Square. He said the owner is working to redevelop the project and put the first floor of the building back into productive use. Mr. Bartow noted that the Mercy Hospital demolition was continuing to progress. Ms. Capone noted that demolition would continue into 2015 after which new construction may begin. Mr. Lumbis noted that the Watertown Local Development Corporation had approved a façade grant for the Lincoln Building. Mayor Graham said that fixing up the building would go a long way to begin the redevelopment of the entire structure. Mr. Schmitt commented that as these projects are considered and come on line that the City should ensure that adequate parking is available as parking can be a real challenge in the downtown area.

Mr. Lumbis then provided an update on the Factory Street Reconstruction Project noting that advance detailed plans (90% complete) have been submitted to the City for review, and it is anticipated that the project will go out to bid over the winter with construction starting in the spring of 2015. Mayor Graham noted that the Watertown Local Development Corporation was considering a downtown assistance loan program for business owners along Factory Street. He said this would be similar to the loan program that was undertaken during the Public Square Reconstruction and Streetscape Project.

CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Mr. Bartow stated that he will be attending the City Council Work Session on August 25 to discuss having the Council formally acknowledge the existence of the Advantage Watertown Committee Members. He said that he was working with Ken Mix on drafting a resolution to present to the City Council that would make the acknowledgement official. He noted that he would also be asking the City Council if there are any particular projects that they would like Advantage Watertown to focus on.

Mr. Bartow noted that the next meeting was September 11, 2014 at 8:30 a.m. The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 a.m.